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Reminiscences of James Shoemaker

[The following reminiscences were contained in a manuscript left by James Shoemaker, of Putnam county, now dead some years. In a somewhat altered form it was published in *The Indiana Farmer*, Dec. 10, 1898.]

MY parents, Evan and Eve Shoemaker, moved from East Tennessee about the year 1809, and settled in Salisbury, a small village midway between where Centerville and Richmond now are, in Wayne county. There I was born July 30, 1812. My parents remained in the vicinity of Salisbury until after the ratification of peace between the United States and Great Britain in 1815. In the fall of 1816 my father, in company with three or four other pioneer families, settled in what is now Randolph county. They pitched their tents in an almost impenetrable wilderness, surrounded by wild beasts and savage Indians. The nearest white man's cabin on the north was 60 or 70 miles (at Fort Wayne); the nearest settlement on the east was 15 or 20 miles. All west belonged to the Indians.

Our pioneer fathers had all their provisions (except meat) to procure in the old settlement, until they could raise the same at home, and that could not be done until they cleared, fenced and cultivated their ground. The roads over which they had to convey their provisions I will not describe, for they had none. The west line of my father's land was the dividing line between the old and the new purchase. Here (in the new purchase) the Indians were the bonafide owners of the soil, not having as yet ceded their lands to the United States. Notwithstanding the Indians professed friendship and came daily either to beg or exchange baskets, moccasins, leggings or different kinds of embroidery for salt, meat, tobacco, meal, flour, or anything you had to dispose of, yet they viewed each white person with jealousy and wished for an opportunity to do an injury. I recollect one day an Indian chief came to my father's house in his absence. He wanted some milk and butter. He had a deer skin keg to put his milk in. After getting his milk, he wanted a saucer to carry his butter in. Mother refused to let him have the saucer, whereupon he became very angry, brandished his tomahawk and swore he wished it would be war again, so that he could get to scalp my mother and a man named Jordan.

At that time (1816) the Indians had a stake or post, around which they burned their prisoners, in the adjoining county of Delaware. It was then near where Muncie now is. I saw this post in 1833. It was considerably burned and charred for several feet above the ground, and a rise or mound of 18 or 20 inches around the post was overgrown with blue grass. It was then a standing monument of savage cruelty.*

When I was a lad six or seven years old I would go to the Indian camps and play with the young Indians. Sometimes I would find them at their favorite sport—shooting with bows and arrows. At other times there would be a score or more young Indians lying in their camps, or in the shady grove, in a state of perfect nudity. In the morning the adult Indians would take guns, tomahawks and butcher knives, the younger class their bows and arrows, and start in pursuit of game, leaving the old squaws to perform the drudgery of the camp. They always went armed. From noon until dark the hunters would keep strolling in; one with a deer lashed on his back, another with a turkey, a third with a ham or shoulder of meat, or hog with the hair on, and still another with a raccoon, opossum, porcupine, ground-hog, etc.

The Indian men, women, and children, and the dogs would occupy the same tent. The dogs generally slept on the meal sacks as they made them a nice soft bed. I have seen them bake their bread in this manner. They would first burn a brush pile, then rake off the coals and ashes, then roll out their dough, lay it down on the hot ground and cover it up with hot embers and coals, and it would soon bake, and the dog hairs would keep it from crumbling or falling to pieces.

If I were to tell you how annoying the horseflies and mosquitoes were in the summer and fall seasons, you would not believe me, therefore I will not tell you. Wild animals such as the bear, panther, wolf, catamount and wild cat were numerous and annoying. The settlers had to pen their hogs and sheep in their door yards around their cabins every night, and even then the wolves and wild cats would often carry off the pigs and lambs, and even young calves, notwithstanding each settler was provided with a good rifle and from one to three dogs. The cows were belled and turned out to range, the horses were belled and hobbled

*See article on Torture Stake in Delaware County.

Each settler could identify the peculiar tinkle of his bells among 20 others. In the spring of the year we had different kinds of tea—tolbit, spicewood, sassafras, and the chips of the sycamore, all which made excellent tea for the spring of the year. While home-made sugar lasted, store tea, sugar and coffee were not in common use. From 1815 to 1823 there was many a young housewife who could spin, weave, cut out, and make her husband a decent suit of clothes that did not know how to make a cup of store tea or coffee. * * * * When I was a boy six or seven years old I heard my uncle say that after dancing with a large Dutch girl the night before, he took a seat on a three legged stool and invited her to take a seat on his knee. She did so. He gently laid his arm around her shoulder, when she turned her head and looked him full in the face. Half affrighted and half delighted she said: "You hug mine mamma; she is bigger as I." I will now give another instance where the lady thought she was big enough, but the change was lacking. One morning Esq. Jones saw a young gent ride up with a young lady behind him. They dismounted; he hitched his horse and they made for the house and were invited to be seated. After waiting a few minutes the young man asked if he was the 'squire. He informed him that he was. He then asked the 'squire what he charged for tying the knot. "You mean for marrying you?" "Yes sir." "One dollar," says the 'squire. "Will you take it in trade?" "What kind of trade?" "Beeswax." "Bring it in." The young man went to where the horse was tied and brought in the beeswax, but it lacked 40 cents of being enough to pay the bill. After sitting pensive for some minutes the young man went to the door and said, "Well, Sal, let's be going." Sal slowly followed to the door, when turning to the justice, with an entreating look, she said: "Well 'Squire, can't you tie the knot as far as the beeswax goes anyhow," and so he did, and they were married

I moved to Putnam county October 25, 1839. At that time Floyd township was as thickly settled, except in Groveland, as at present. There were then (1839) 240 taxpayers; now there are 262 in the township. * * * * When we commenced growing wheat it was sown in the corn among the standing trees

and stumps. It was cut with a reap hook and either threshed out with flails or tramped out in the field on the ground with horses. In either case there was always dirt or gravel enough left in the wheat to sharpen your teeth, if not your appetite. When the wheat was threshed it was winnowed with a sheet, taken to a water mill on horse back, ground on a corn cracker, bolted by hand and taken home to be baked in a skillet for breakfast on Sundays. In the fall season we took our wheat to Crawfordsville, where we got good flour. From 1837 to 1842 or '43 times were extremely hard. Everything we had to buy, except sugar and coffee, were very high. For our surplus produce we had almost no market. In 1839 and '40, prior to the completion of the Wabash and Erie canal, we hauled our wheat to different points on the Ohio river, where we received from 38 to 40 cents per bushel. In 1841 I hauled a load of wheat (25 bushels) to Hamilton, O., from Floyd township, Putnam county, a distance of about 150 miles, for which I received 38 cents per bushel. In the fall of 1839 Capt. John Roberts of Jackson township, Maj. Ash of Greencastle, and John Allen of Floyd township, bought and packed hogs for which they paid \$1.25 per cwt. gross. They sold their bacon in New Orleans for \$1.50 per cwt. Roberts and Ash broke up. Allen said he saved himself but lost his money.

Indian Torture Post in Delaware County

THE allusion in the foregoing reminiscences to the old Indian torture stake that stood within the present bounds of Delaware county is one of the few testimonies to the existence of that barbarous relic. Of the various local histories and books of reminiscence only one, as far as we know, makes mention of it. This is the Rev. W. C. Smith's *Indiana Miscellanies*. Mr. Smith describes the stake as of oak, about ten feet high, with the rough outline of a human face cut on either side. The fires, according to this writer, had been kindled in a circle around the stake at a distance of some five or six feet. When he saw it the ashes formed a perceptible ridge, and an outer circle, where the Indians had danced, was packed so hard that nothing would grow there.